Assassination critic FBI records to UWSP

Freedom of Information... if you can afford it

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donates Archives

By George Leopold

Recently released Federal Bureau of Investigation records dealing with its investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy have been donated to UWSP by author-critic Harold Weisberg.

An indefatigable opponent of the official investigation and author of six books on the JFK assassination, Weisberg was awarded a free set of FBI documents by U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell on January 16. The decision stemmed from one of over two dozen Freedom of Information Act suits filed by Weisberg since May, 1966 in an attempt to gain the release of the FBI's records on the President's murder.

In this most recent case, Weisberg successfully sought remission of copying costs on some 40,000 pages of documents arguing that "official stonewalling" in the courts has left him indigent.

Weisberg's gift to the university will include nearly 100,000 pages of assassination documents that have been released by the Justice Department in two large installments. The first occurred on December 7, 1977; the second just over two weeks ago.

When they eventually arrive, the documents will be placed in the university political assassination archives which was established in November, 1976, during a national symposium on the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. and President Kennedy which Weisberg addressed.

The establishment of the archives on the Stevens Point campus will allow assassination researchers such as UWSP professor David Wrone to pursue the truth about the murder.

Regarding the Weisberg donation, Wrone stated that "this will serve as a basis for developing an outstanding research archive for the study of important issues in mid-20th century America."

Chancellor Lee Dreyfus commented that the gift would enable the university to "gain a distinction for scholarship on this issue." He added that the unique combination of an assassination archives and Professor Wrone's scholarly abilities would further distinguish the university, and would allow for "serious study" of the JFK assassination in the years to come.

Although he was successful in obtaining the FBI documents, Weisberg has been critical of the way in which the Justice Department has released them to the press. According to the critic, the current releases were staged so that by their mass alone, they become a "new form of suppression."

Because of this volume and the high cost of copying--the FBI charges ten cents a page--access is effectively denied. As a result, the "deadline-beseiged press" is forced to report uncritically on the contents of each release.

Weisberg also noted that despite the recent releases of various documents, most of the relevant FBI records are still suppressed by the Justice Department.

In announcing his decision, Judge Gesell stated that no records would be coming to light now were it not for Weisberg's decade-long court struggle under the Freedom of Information Act. It was this litigation that led to a congressional change in the law that cleared the way for release of the FBI files.

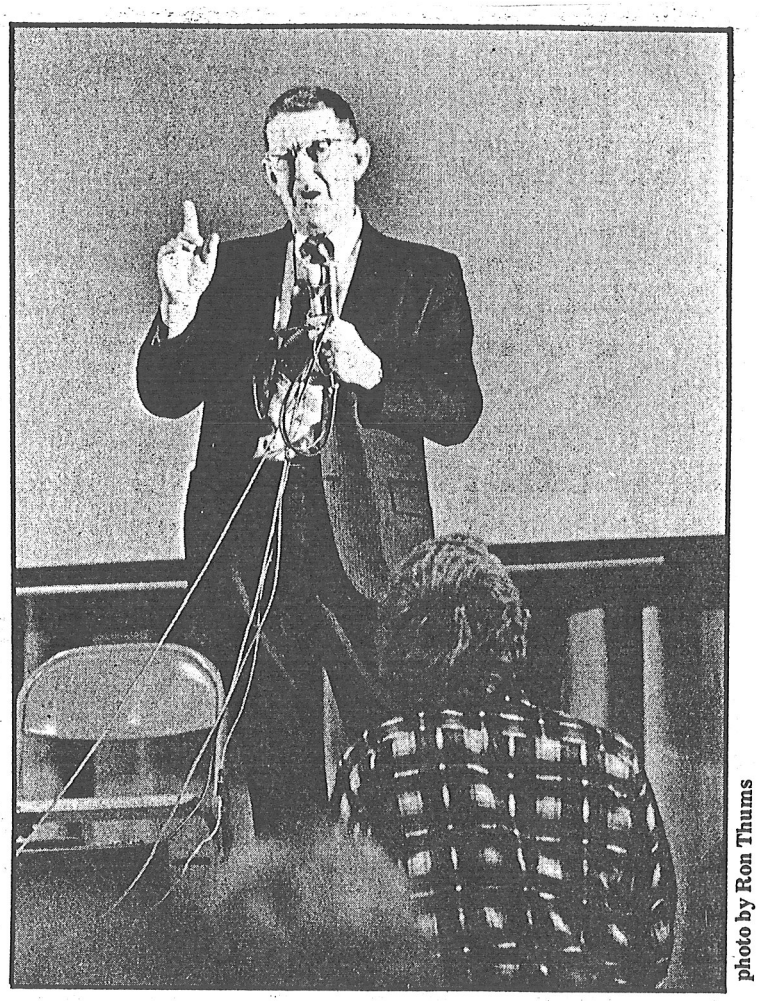

photo by Ron Thums

Noted critic Harold Weisberg drives home a point during a national symposium on the King & Kennedy assassinations held here in November, 1976.

Along with this most recent donation, Weisberg also previously deposited in the archives a large amount of material from his personal files on the King and Kennedy assassinations. At that time he also contributed ten file drawers of records on an American pro-Nazi organization active in the 1930's known as the "Silvershirts".